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THE

MISCHIEFS

OF

LEGISLATIVE CAUCUSES,

EXPOSED IN AN

ADDRESS

TO THE

PEOPLE OF CONNECTICUT.

BY

TRUMBULL.

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ADDRESS.

To all the real friends of the State of Connecticut, of every sect, denomination and party whatever:

FELLOW CITIZENS,

Feeling a deep interest in common with you in the peace and prosperity of this heretofore highly favoured community, I wish to address you on a subject of more importance than any which has occurred since the formation of a government in our beloved state.

I have chosen this period, because it appeared to my mind to be more favourable to cool reflection than any which might occur in the course of the year. We are now free from the excitement of an approaching election. The party in power have finished their work for this year; and the severe shock which has been every where felt by their legislative results, has so far subsided, that our judgments can be safely trusted. Nor is there any thing in the political affairs of the nation calculated to awaken passion or the spirit of party. The measures of the general government are approved by all good citizens; and while they evince wisdom and fidelity in our national councils, they excite neither jealousy, distrust nor clamor. The great questions which have so long and so unhappily divided public opinion, have been put at rest, by the general peace in Europe; and harmony prevails to a degree unknown, since the establishment of the national government.

In regard to our own State, the formation and adoption of the new Constitution has quieted the minds of those who wished for an enlargement of the right of suffrage, and for greater freedom in religion. All male citizens above twenty-one years of age, may now vote at our elections: and the small nominal superiority which the Congregationalists had over the other denominations, arising solely from their being a majority, is now removed; and all are placed on a perfect level. Whether these provisions are wise or unwise, and whether it was discreet to cause such changes in our political institutions, is not now to be questioned. All agree, that the Constitution must be implicitly obeyed, as the supreme law of the land. I cannot imagine, therefore, a more favourable time for candid reflec-

tion on the past, and sober meditation on the future. I do not wish to indulge in unprofitable speculations on what has been done, and which cannot be recalled. Recrimination, and the mutual accusations of partizans against their political adversaries, have produced great evils—they should never be indulged except when just; and also when necessary to influence our conduct in future. The enquiry now should be, what course, under existing circumstances, does wisdom point out: and to give an enlightened answer to that question, a recurrence must be had to past events.

In this point of view only, it is proper, and not only proper, but necessary to inquire into the conduct of public men. Without such a scrutiny, we cannot learn whether they are entitled to our confidence and whether they may be trusted in future. Here, again I would remark, that a single mistake, or many mistakes, or even great errors, while the motives are pure, should be no ground for withdrawing our confidence from public men. To err is the lot of humanity. Great and wise men are not exempt from this frailty of our natures. I come not, therefore, to speak to you of some unwise measures adopted by your rulers, from misapprehension or error. These might be corrected by the same men when better informed, and entirely avoided in future. My message is of a different character. I come to inform you that your interests have not been even consulted for the three last sessions of the General Assembly; and that the foulest corruption has defiled the sanctuary of legislation.

It is now more than three years since a combination was formed among the restless, ambitious and dissolute part of the community, to seize upon all the public offices in the state, and apportion them among themselves. If this combination was in some measure tacit, it was nevertheless real and practical. To promote its views, a standard was raised, called *Toleration*, and offices were unblushingly offered to all who would resort to it.

Thus every office in the state, for three years past, has been *in market*, except those of Judges of the Superior Court and Supreme Court of Errors. It was falsely pretended that these were too sacred to be sported with, or wantonly bartered away; and the strongest assurances were made, that they should remain sacred as they ought to have been; yet these have been sold at auction to the highest bidder, and the present occupants have yielded as a consid-

gration, an entire adherence to this standard. To this remark there is one honorable exception. His appointment, however, is well known to have been occasioned by the abortion of a monstrous caucus-arrangement, by which a State senator was to have been transferred to the Senate of the United States; and a Senator of the United States, to have been placed on the bench of the Supreme Court.

Among some of the first operations of this combination, we have seen meetings, called caucusses, holden in all parts of the state, to devise plans to deceive and mislead the people. Every species of falsehood and fraud was resorted to, to effect their object, and at length they succeeded in electing a new representation to Congress, and a majority in both branches of the State legislature.

Here, for the honor of the State, I could wish to draw a veil over the disgraceful and alarming proceedings of the legislature, since a majority of its members have been selected out of that combination; but truth, and a regard to the welfare of the people and posterity, oblige me to state, what, indeed, is well known: that a majority of both Houses have met to consult, not for the good of the state, but merely to appoint themselves and others who belong to this combination, to office. Were there written articles or covenants under hand and seal to this effect, they would not be more effectual, or more rigidly adhered to. Hence it is, that while the General Assembly is in session, and especially, when the subject of appointments is under consideration, there have been many more of that combination, who do not belong to the General Assembly, attending there to influence appointments, than those who are members of that body. Yes, fellow citizens, strange and abhorrent as it may appear to a pure mind, it is nevertheless true, that for the three last sessions, it has been the constant practice of members of the legislature to hold meetings called caucusses, with any and all who see fit to assemble, from all parts of the state, of whatever character or standing, and without any other credentials than an assurance that they are prepared to go all lengths *in turning out and putting in.*

Here, too, as is usual in other assemblies, the minority is pledged to give way to the majority; and every measure carried by a major vote in these meetings, is of course voted for by all who belong to this party in the legislature, whatever may be their own private opinion regarding it.

Were these meetings composed of a portion of the legislature, in exclusion of the remainder, but without admitting others from abroad, they would be sufficiently alarming to excite the vigilant attention of every friend to the state. Even in that case, it is perfectly evident, that measures might be carried against the opinion of a decided majority of the legislature. A measure is adopted in caucus by a small majority—now if the minority, when the subject comes before the house, would act according to their opinions, their votes, when united with those who do not belong to this combination, might defeat the measure. This, however, they will not do; but in defiance of their "best judgment," and, when your interest and mine, and that of the state and posterity, and the solemn oath of God all require them so to act, they vote in direct opposition to their own convictions in obedience to the decisions of a caucus. What would the people think, if three out of the five judges of our Supreme Court, should enter into a combination to decide all causes without consulting the other two; and to this end, should retire by themselves to discuss and determine each cause, and having formed their opinion, should call in the other two, to legalize the decision of a majority of the three? Is it not easy to perceive that in this mode, two out of five might controul the cause?

I know that these suppositions may seem extravagant, but let me tell you, fellow citizens, that unless this system of caucussing receive a seasonable check from you, some of us may live to see caucus judges as well as caucus legislators; nor is it more monstrous or alarming in one case than in the other. There is nothing more sacred in the rights of parties to a suit in court, than in the rights of the public in legislative proceedings; and the danger of extensive evils is far less, from corrupt decisions in private causes, than in public measures; as judges are not supposed to have any interest in those causes: whereas, the sole object of these legislative caucusses is, the promotion of the interest of the members, in the appointment to office. But if these meetings would be so alarming when held by a portion of the legislature, what are we to think of them, when the worthless and abandoned are admitted to participate in their deliberations and decisions?

In this way it is evident, that as a majority of the caucus do not belong to the Assembly, a measure of vital importance may be adopted against the conviction of every member of that body, in

compliance with the decision of a caucus. And is it so? That the people, instead of being called to yield obedience to regulations made by their representatives duly chosen, are compelled to submit to the will of a caucus, composed of the ambitious, the restless and the profligate?

But again, as these caucusses are unauthorized by any law or usage, and as there is no regular mode of convening them, there is room for the practice of the most gross fraud upon each other. Hence it has happened that in the case of appointing candidates, both belonging to the favoured party, and both having friends who would attend a caucus, one of them warns a meeting, giving no notice to the opposing candidate or his friends, and thus secures a major vote in caucus, and ultimately an appointment in the legislature.

This combination, by these means, in a little more than three years, has reduced our state from the highest point of elevation, to the lowest point of depression. In the general government we have uniformly furnished the House of Representatives with gentlemen of the first talents, of unquestioned integrity, and who, by their political opponents, have been acknowledged to be the safest guardians of the public treasure, and on this interesting subject, have had their full share of influence. In the places of such men, who will be found in the next House of Representatives? I will not undertake the disgusting task of analyzing their characters, and of holding them up in contrast with those of their distinguished predecessors; but I will ask you to turn your attention to the men individually, and enquire what have been their private characters? (For *public* characters they have not sustained.) What standing and rank have they held in their various professions and employments? What have their neighbors thought of their capacity and integrity? Who has confided to them his own private concerns?

In the Senate of the United States, a gentleman of a known public character, who, through a long course of public service, to which he was called in early life, has sustained the reputation of undeviating integrity and firmness, and who has been no less distinguished for *brilliancy* than *solidity* of *talents*, has been superceded, to make room for the election of one signalized for nothing but pomp, froth and noise at the bar.

Your judiciary, fellow citizens, where is it? A few years since it was your pride; it was the admiration of your surrounding neighbors —where is it now? Amidst all the professions of the present ruling party, that this sanctuary should, in all events, be held inviolate, and by which some of you have been enticed and allured to aid them in their iniquitous course, where is it now? I need not say, that the honour of our state is prostrate; and that we are humbled in the dust.

As to the character of those judges who have been removed from the Superior Court and Supreme Court of Errors, it is unnecessary to speak particularly: they are personally known to many of you, and their characters are known to you all. Having very soon distinguished themselves at the bar, they were early promoted by the unbiassed suffrages of the freemen, to some of the highest offices in the gift of the people; and this, too, when such a thing as a caucus, or a ticket was unknown in this state; but when every freeman was a *freeman* indeed, and gave his vote according to the dictates of his conscience and judgment.

Will it be said, that the public has gained any thing by superiority of qualifications in the new judges over their predecessors? If so, I ask you to go with me to the seats of justice in the various counties, and call to mind the patience of investigation, the soundness of judgment, and the stern integrity which you have there witnessed: If this does not satisfy you, go back to the bar and there enquire who held the superior rank? They have, in some instances, practised in the same courts—been concerned in the same causes; and a comparison can easily be made. If any of you are so far under the influence of the excitement of party, as to be unable to view things in their true light, I pray you to go back with me three or four years, and ask yourselves what would have been your sensations, had you been told that Judge Swift, Trumbull, Edmond, Smith, Baldwin, Goddard and Gould, were all to be removed to make room for John T. Peters, Asa Chapman and William Bristol, Esquires?

Of the judges thus sacrificed by the combination of which I have spoken, it may truly be said, that they unitedly possessed qualifications and talents rarely witnessed in the same number of men. Who in Connecticut is ignorant of the high attainments in science and literature, of the profound knowledge of law, of the native vigor

and deep penetration of mind, and of the unyielding integrity lately so conspicuous on the seat of judgment?

Will it be said that the new judges have superior claims, aside from personal qualifications? If so, I would enquire on what those claims are founded? Does the fact that the former judges when appointed to the bench, left very extensive and lucrative business, and resigned it to those who are rising into notice, afford any such claim? Or can it be found in the fact that the office of judge has been considered so permanent that these gentlemen might entertain an entire confidence that, leaving profitable employments for seats on the bench, they would be continued in office during good behaviour?

The reason of this procedure cannot be found in the *ordinary operations of party spirit*, but must be sought after in the still darker and more gloomy regions to which I have just directed your attention. Is it not well known that our late judges have taken no part in political controversy? When called to exercise their rights as citizens and as freemen, they have followed the dictates of their own consciences, without taking any pains to influence others; and in the great questions which have agitated the political world for years past, as they have not been called on to act officially, their opinions have been scarcely known. Conscious, that not only a strict impartiality, but freedom from even the suspicion of a contrary disposition, was of the first importance in a judge, they have, as it is well understood, kept their feelings equally balanced between the conflicting parties, and the consequences have been, that the most zealous partizans of each party, have had equal confidence in their decisions; nor has a whisper of complaint of partiality been heard from any quarter. Two of these gentlemen, have, indeed, been frequently charged with treason; and their names have been held up to public execration as traitors, for no other reason, than that they performed with fidelity, an important public trust conferred on them by the supreme power of the State. It is well known that neither of them had any agency in originating or constituting the New-England Convention, nor had they been in situations to act on the subjects, or agitate the points which led to it. They were therefore selected as the safest guardians of the public interest, with unlimited powers to act as their consciences should dictate. The period, all agree, was extremely interesting and crit-

ical. Had these gentlemen refused to accept the trust, and exert all their powers for the welfare of the community, they would have deserved all the censure and abuse which they have received for doing what every man will, on sober reflection, say, was their undoubted duty. It is also to be remembered, that the loudest clamour on this subject, has been made by those time-serving politicians who are bold and noisy in favor of measures dictated by the majority, but who shrink from duty when their idol, popularity, would be put in jeopardy. It is not to be concealed, that many of those, now the favorites of the mischievous combination, whose deadly influence I mean to expose, were the most engaged in the formation of that convention, but who now, with dastardly meanness, join in the slander uttered against the excellent men who composed it.

In regard to sheriffs, judges of courts of common pleas, justices of quorum, judges of probate, justices of peace, clerks of courts, and even down to commissioners of turnpike roads, there has been one sweep of removal, with few exceptions arising out of particular circumstances.

And what have these public servants done that they should be thus treated? Or rather, what have you done, my fellow citizens, that you should be deprived of the integrity and talents of these tried and faithful officers? That any of them have been negligent in duty, or unworthy of public confidence, no one asserts, or is hardy enough to suspect. They were originally selected from the body of the people, and appointed to these offices because by education, habits and character, they were fitted for the discharge of the duties of them. These duties had become familiar to them, and their usefulness to the community was much enhanced by their experience. These offices have now been filled with those who were most zealous formerly in the federal ranks, but who did not possess the confidence of that party so as to entitle them to office; or by other restless and impassioned young men. And is it come to this? That in the enlightened state of Connecticut, such qualities should secure public favor?

Neither with the democrats of the old school, nor with the tolerationists, as such, have I any contest. Of the former, many early viewed the first administrations of the General Government, and the men in power in this State, who approbated the measures of those administrations, with an eye of suspicion, if not of distrust.

They thought that there was an attempt to depart from the principles which conducted us through the war of the revolution, and a tendency to imitate governments founded on the principles of royalty or aristocracy, and all their prejudices and fears, were, of course, alarmed. Men, who have since evinced their entire want of principle, labored to fan the flame of discord to promote their own ambitious views, and were but too successful. Those times have passed away, and every sober man, on a careful review of the contentions which existed, and which so unhappily distracted our country, sees, in the conduct of each of the great parties, much to regret. A recurrence to these scenes now, would be worse than useless, if the object were only to censure or applaud men and measures which we then condemned or approved; still it is proper to regard them as exhibitions of the fury with which upright citizens may assail each other, one day, and on the next, unite in principle and practice.

I have said, that, with the tolerationists, merely as such, I feel no disposition to contend. As to those of them who have joined a foul combination to seize on all the offices and apportion them among those who will rally around their unhallowed standard, they have my most hearty contempt; as, I am sure they soon will, that of every honest man in the community. Such wretched office-seekers cannot maintain an elevated standing with honorable men: their popularity will soon decay. They may now regale themselves under the shadow of the gourd which "sprang up in the night," but it will wither also "in a night," and they will faint under the indignation of an insulted community. As to those of this party who verily thought that a partial reform in our political condition was necessary—that some intolerance was cherished, and that certain men were not sufficiently liberal in their views, without deciding on the correctness of their opinions, I come not to censure them. These men little thought that consequences such as we have seen, would follow. It was no part of their design to drive from the temple of justice such men as Swift and Smith, nor to deprive Edmond, as upright a judge as ever lived, at the age of sixty, of the means of support. These gentlemen, for nearly twenty years, had sustained their dignified stations with honor to themselves, and with the highest benefit to the state; and the latter gentleman had sealed his love of country by shedding his blood in her defence,

while most of those men who have driven him from his seat were in their cradles. His wounds still remain; and they are damning proofs of the wickedness of a combination which has aimed another dagger at his vitals.

I repeat, with neither of these descriptions of men am I contending: I mean to expose to public view, the restless, ambitious and unprincipled, distinct from either of these classes but who have availed themselves of all the prejudices of both. I have never, for a moment, doubted, but that there were many, very honest men among the democrats of the old school, but these during the last year, have been left in the back ground. Neither have I doubted but that honorable men have joined the standard of toleration from the purest motives. These were not seeking offices for themselves; and when they shall view the conduct of the men I am arraigning at the bar of the public in its true light, they will abhor it as much as I do. A few others have joined the party with a view to office but have had too much principle to go all lengths in the system of caucussing, or to join in the management and fraud necessary to obtain their object. These men never realized the dangerous tendency and consequences of such revolutionary schemes.

It is not my intention to enter into a discussion of the particular acts of the General Assembly since this party obtained the ascendency in our councils: those acts have been mere experiments calculated to amuse the people, and allure them from an attention to their favorite employment of seizing upon the offices. Their effect cannot be foretold, and perhaps in the hands of an all-wise Providence, it may be less mischievous than is feared. The great measure, the new system of taxation, and the only one of any importance, is yet to be tested by experience. It can be, however, now safely affirmed, that an entire change of a system which has been in operation for more than a century, and to which all property and the price of labor has conformed, would never have been hazarded by men whose passions had not influenced their judgments; and who were not determined to break down ancient regulations to secure popularity. This system is grossly defective; as it provides no rules for the valuation of the articles subject to taxation, but commits almost every thing to vague opinion, and thus opens a wide door for partiality and favoritism. At the same time it provides for the creation of numerous assessors who are to receive emoluments

from the several towns, and thus add greatly to the burdens under which we labor.

Concerning these measures I shall say no more—my great complaint is, that corruption has defiled the sanctuary of legislation for the year past, and has more or less influenced all results. If I mistake not, in no state, or nation, has such corruption been tolerated as that the members of the legislature should assemble with the abandoned and profligate who see fit to meet from all parts of the community for the purpose of settling its proceedings, especially when these individuals are candidates for office, and meet for the object of obtaining it. Will it be said by the people, we have no interest in this subject; it is a mere scramble for places, and it is no matter who is in or out of office, as we do not wish to seek it? Permit me to tell you, that we all have a deep interest in the appointments to office: our rights of every description are placed in the hands of the various public officers; and, in case they are weak; or unprincipled men, we have no safety. Particular acts of weakness, or corruption, even to bribery, may not always be detected, while the effects of this weakness, or wickedness, may be injurious in a high degree, both in extent, and duration. And I venture to say, that the present mode of obtaining office, if persisted in, will, very soon, exclude every man worthy of confidence. The scramble for office will continue and increase, but it will be among the base and undeserving; while those who are worthy, will retire from a scene so disgusting to all honorable minds. In this view, even the smallness of salaries so beneficial to the state heretofore, will be a source of great evil. Let it be once settled, that offices can be obtained by base means, and by great and shameless exertions of the candidates, and none, whose time is of much value to himself, can afford to make the necessary sacrifice: whereas, higher salaries would bring into competition a higher grade of talents. As a general rule, those who have succeeded best in their own concerns, can be most safely trusted with the concerns of the public; but men of this character will too highly estimate their time, to make sacrifices to obtain office with low salaries; and whether physicians, farmers, merchants, or mechanics, they will choose to pursue their professions or employments, which have hitherto been both lucrative and honorable, and will not desert them in quest of objects of inferior value. But lawyers without talents, integrity

or business, quack doctors, broken merchants, idle farmers and idle mechanics, tavern haunters and gamblers, can afford to spend days, weeks, months and years, in low intrigues, in inculcating falsehoods, in preaching politics in bar-rooms, and at the corners of streets and highways, for the sake of an office with a small income; and that for this plain reason, that the time which they thus devote to public use, is worth nothing to themselves.

Let it not be imagined that I am a friend to high salaries: in that respect a more happy state of things than has heretofore been experienced in Connecticut, cannot exist. With very low salaries, the first talents and integrity have generally been secured to the state, because office has flowed from the people through uncorrupted channels, and public opinion has stamped with infamy, every attempt to obtain office by unworthy means. In such a state of things, good men will be induced to make sacrifices of private interest, to the public good; and the offices, if not lucrative, are nevertheless honorable. If, however, the people will suffer those channels to be polluted, and the various public offices to become the subject of bargain and sale, it would be much better that the salaries should be such as to bring into competition men of talents, who have been successful in some regular business, than to leave them for the low scramble of the idle and worthless part of the community.

If I have succeeded in shewing that an evil of no ordinary magnitude exists, and have pointed you to the origin of that evil, the remedy is obvious. It is, to teach your public servants of the legislature, that they are bound to consult the interest of the state, and not exclusively their own interest, or that of their friends. That they are sent by you to make laws and adopt regulations for the welfare of the state, and not to electioneer for office; and that the hall of legislation is no longer to be an auction room for the bargains and sales of places, but a sanctuary for the protection of the interests and rights of the people.

You must, to this end, effectually teach them, that caucusses, composed of any portion of the legislature, to consult and devise respecting public measures, are no longer to be endured. It is greatly to be lamented that such meetings should be held for any purpose, but in a time when the spirit of party prevails, it may be necessary for the people to meet, to agree on candidates for the legislature, or for the representatives in congress, to secure union of action.

Between these, however, and the self-created assemblies during the session of the legislature, for the purpose of influencing its discussions and measures, there is no similitude. The one may be tolerated while its necessity is lamented, the other must be immediately abolished or the state is ruined.

But the question arises, how shall the independent electors of Connecticut secure to the state, members of both branches of the General Assembly, who will meet and consult for the good of the whole body politic, regardless of selfish views and party considerations? I answer, whenever called to exercise the elective franchise, vote for none but men of principle; and do not violate your consciences in aiding to elevate a man because he belongs to this or that party. Beware of any set of men who combine to force themselves and each other into office. Above all, mark every man who heretofore has, or hereafter may, give countenance to legislative caucusses.

My appeal is not to any one political party, but to the *friends of the state*, and I trust I shall not make the appeal in vain. You are unquestionably a large majority—you hold no offices—you wish for none—you are men of business—you have interests of importance, and rights which are dear to you, to be protected—you may suffer many wrongs which ought to be redressed—you have a deep concern in the welfare of the community. Reform then, I conjure you, the legislature from its corrupt practices, and cause your best men to be appointed to office.

TRUMBULL.

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